

## Mayor announces ‘Confederate Memorial Day.’ A city council member says it should cost him his job.

By **Reis Thebault**

April 5, 2019 at 11:05 p.m. EDT

A central Florida mayor said he wanted his city to know that he didn’t think there was anything wrong with celebrating a “Confederate Memorial Day” later this month. He also said he wanted people to know that he’s not racist.

Ocala Mayor Kent Guinn has made both assertions several times this week, after he signed a proclamation Tuesday at a Ocala City Council meeting declaring April 26 “a time in which to honor the memories of those who sacrificed their lives in the War Between States” — the Civil War sobriquet employed by followers of “Lost Cause” pseudohistory that seeks to whitewash slavery and Confederate atrocities.

After Guinn signed the order, which was not subject to a vote, council President Mary Sue Rich dissented.

“I’m not proud of you doing a Confederacy proclamation standing up here in front of all these people in the city of Ocala. That turns my stomach,” Rich said at the end of the meeting, adding that she feels the declaration should disqualify Guinn from reelection. “I don’t think you deserve to be the mayor of Ocala. I hope somebody runs against you.”

Rich then alluded to allegations that Guinn has ties to the Ku Klux Klan.

“When people say you are a member of the Ku Klux Klan, I’m beginning to believe them,” she said.

On Wednesday, Guinn again denied he is, or has ever been, a member of the white supremacist organization. Those allegations, made when the Anonymous hacking collective included Guinn’s name on a list of politicians who supposedly had links to the Klan, have followed him for more than three years.

“I am not — repeat, not — in the KKK,” Guinn said at a news conference. “I never have been. I never will be, and I despise and hate everything that organization stands for.”

In an interview with The Washington Post, Guinn said the resolution is “simply a memorial for Confederate soldiers who were veterans.” When asked why another holiday, on top of Veterans Day and Memorial Day, was necessary, Guinn mentioned Black History Month and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. He also said he wasn’t equating either of those celebrations with his Confederate Memorial Day.

When pressed about the Confederacy’s proslavery ideology, Guinn conceded he is no Civil War scholar. He said, “It was about more than just slavery,” an assertion that has been debunked by many historians.

In Guinn’s view, the prospect of memorializing the Confederacy was “a no-win situation.” He said he endorsed the measure after local members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy lobbied for it. If he decided against signing the order, he said, his constituents who cherish their Confederate heritage would have been upset with him, too.

“That’s the problem with our country. We worry about offending people too much,” Guinn said. “I haven’t done anything wrong by doing this proclamation, and I stand by it.”

He said he has signed similar declarations in years past and that other lawmakers in Marion County, where Ocala is located, have also done so. The state of Florida also considers Confederate Memorial Day a legal holiday. (It also is still an official holiday in Mississippi and Alabama.)

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Guinn blamed the week’s controversy on an old quarrel with Rich. At a March council meeting, the two had a similar faceoff over a resolution that would have declared Ocala a “City of Peace,” a proposal put forth by Ollin Women International. Guinn said the founder of Ollin is a terrorist sympathizer. Rich said, “People have said things about you. They told me you were a member of the Ku Klux Klan.”

The mayor said most other Ocala residents didn’t have a problem with the memorial declaration.

“I probably got 15-to-1 emails from people in support of us doing it,” he said.

At the Tuesday meeting, the Ocala Star-Banner reported, several people voiced their opposition.

“The city has invested many years developing an image as a modern, forward-thinking, all-inclusive community through its racial harmony and cultural awareness task force,” said Avelia Perkins, president of advocacy organization the Bridges Project of Ocala/Marion County. “We thus ask that the city not erode such progress by acceding to a very small group, which glories in a romanticized past.”

Civil War scholar Kevin M. Levin criticized Guinn for the proclamation’s language. Levin said it peddled a gauzy, revisionist history.

“This is pure cowardice,” Levin wrote on Twitter. “Ocala, Florida Mayor Kent Guinn signs a proclamation for Confederate Memorial Day, but no effort is made to say what the war was about or what it resolved.”

Guinn’s proclamation is the latest Confederacy dispute to roil Ocala. For years, a Confederate flag flew in front of the Marion County government’s headquarters. After nine people were gunned down in a black church in Charleston, S.C., lawmakers acquiesced to public pressure and removed the flag. Weeks later, the county

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property. But it still flies.

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# Proclamation

**WHEREAS**, the Year 2011 marked the Sesquicentennial of the civil conflict that tore the nation in two; and

**WHEREAS**, the month of April is the time during which the Confederate States of America initiated and ended its four-year struggle for a sovereign and independent nation; and

**WHEREAS**, in proportion to its population, the State of Florida lent more soldiers, sailors, and livestock to the Confederate Cause than did any other Southern state; and

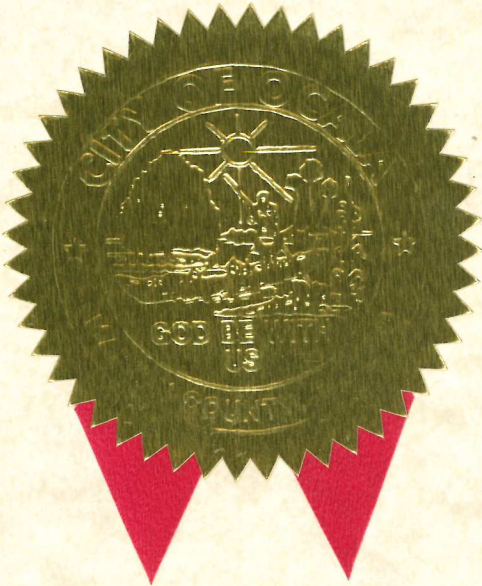
**WHEREAS**, April 26 has been designated by the laws of Florida as a legal holiday, Confederate Memorial Day, a time in which to honor the memories of those who sacrificed their lives in the War Between the States; and

**WHEREAS**, as we recall the tragic events that took place between the years of 1861 and 1865, we do so in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the conflicting ideals and passions that pitted brother against brother and tore a nation apart.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Kent Guinn, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Ocala, Florida, do hereby proclaim that April 26, 2019 be known as

**“CONFEDERATE MEMORIAL DAY”**

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF**, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Ocala, Florida, to be affixed this 19<sup>th</sup> day of March 2019.



Kent Guinn, Mayor  
City of Ocala